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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that reading courses ought to be a required part of the college curriculum for students preparing to teach English in secondary schools. At present, the author points out, only seven states require such training for secondary school certification. The author regrets that relatively few English teachers have had reading education, since quite a few of them are asked to teach reading. It is suggested that teachers elect to train themselves in reading or to enroll in reading courses and that they design reading lessons for their students and use English curriculum content as the basis of these lessons. Two texts are recommended for self-preparation, "The Psychology and Pedagogy of Reading (Huey, 1918) and "Understanding Reading" (Smith, 1971). The author also suggests strategies for developing lessons in reading for the English class and recommends some books which can provide assistance in that development. (Author/DI)

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"Reading Education for English Educators"

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To mention courses in reading education for college students in preparation to teach English is to implicitly assert that reading methodology courses should be a part of these students' programs. As a university professor specialized in reading education, especially reading in the secondary school, this is an assertion all too easy for me to make. After all, isn't each of us rather convinced of the importance of his own field? It seems only fair, therefore, for me to draw justification for my comments not from the literature of reading educators but from comments of specialists in English education.

I would refer you initially to the widely quoted "Guidelines for Preparation of English Teachers", first published in the English Journal in 1968 (Shugre & Evertts). Guideline II of this monumental work explicitly states that preparation in the teaching of reading at the secondary level should be required of all secondary English teachers.

Unfortunately, a few guidelines do not make real what we might all desire. At present, there are only seven states, plus the District of Columbia, which require training in teaching of reading for secondary school certification.

Even more distressing is the fact that only eight other states are presently considering such a requirement change in their certification procedures (Piercy, in press). A little arithmetic shows that thirty-five of the fifty states neither have nor are considering reading as a requirement for secondary certification for either English or other subject area teachers.

This unfortunate condition is drawn into even clearer focus by a recent national survey of English teachers concerning their responsibilities in teaching reading (McGuire, 1969). The nearly 1,000 public high school teachers of English who responded to this survey agreed that they were not well prepared to teach reading at the high school level. Barely a third of them had ever had a course in teaching reading; such a course was rarely required of them in college. The unanswered paradox lies in the fact that an overwhelming percentage of English teachers are at some time asked to teach reading. Wherever reading is introduced into the secondary curriculum, the English department is given consideration as the logical shoulder on which to lay the responsibility.

The first recommendation of this survey, not suprisingly, was that a course in teaching reading be required of students in preparation to teach secondary English. This comes not from the often erudite college professors who while away their time telling others what they should be doing, but from the frontline workers, high school English teachers. Their plea is clear.

The regretable condition will undoubtedly persist. Preparatory programs will continue to require untold credit hours in literature, composition, and grammar, while the fate awaiting English teachers includes heavy emphasis on the teaching of reading, a job for which few will be adequately prepared. And, as Squire and Appleby (1968) so carefully point out, there is quite a difference between teaching literature and teaching reading. Until it should be a routine requirement in all programs, the English teacher or teacher-to-be has but one or perhaps two choices. He may elect courses in reading where he can, or he may study the teaching of reading independently in an intelligent, concientious (should I say, defensive?) strategy. In the time which remains to me, I would like to consider with you how this might be accomplished, to outline what I, as one person with some knowledge of the reading field, would consider basic necessities for English teachers to elect.

The most promising possibility for teaching reading in the English class is to design reading lessons using English curriculum content as the content basis of the lessons. This assumes, of course, that the content has been carefully chosen to meet the abilities and needs of the pupils. But isn't that logical practice whether or not we consider reading instruction as part of the plan? It seems to me to be for the competent teacher not a matter of adjusting the content of the curriculum but of adjusting technique to accommodate the skills of the students.

The prerequisites for this strategy are two in number. First, the English teacher should seek the course which will allow him to explore a basic understanding of the reading process as we presently grasp it. Whether offered as a separate course or part of a course, these understandings are critical in the English teacher's preparation. May I suggest two texts which sufficiently cover the basic concepts, giving you perhaps some flavor of what I'm talking about.

Edmund Burke Huey is a name familiar to most educators; his contribution to our field and to psychology was prodigious. His book, The Psychology and Pedagogy of Reading (Huey, 1918), while it has been available for over half a century, remains a timely comment. There is, in my opinion, no better book on reading available today. Unless, of course, you consider one book which bears a copyright fifty years later, entitled Understanding Reading (Smith, 1971). A psychologist does it again, and, to quote Margaret Early on whom I just happened to be eavesdropping one day, Frank Smith's book on reading is the best thing ever written on the topic.

These two books contain the content which I think should undergird a basic course or unit on the reading process. It seems only reasonable to suggest that before one sets about to teach a process or skill that he have some understanding of what that process is.

Second, the English teacher should seek the course which will familiarize him with a variety of practical, specific strategies for integrating reading instruction with the

English curriculum. A basic understanding of the reading process will lead to an understanding of why reading must be taught at all school levels in all content subjects, including English; an understanding of specific techniques will suggest how this can be done.

Unfortunately, there is no book available which will adequately serve the need of the English teacher for specific help. The best book on the topic remains Harold L. Herber's, Teaching Reading in Content Areas (1970). This text, widely used as the basis for courses in secondary reading, does offer a plethora of detailed example and suggestion. Its major shortcoming is in dealing with the remedial reader in a classroom setting. Hopefully, a course on secondary reading would cover this topic in other ways.

My suggestion for ideas on teaching the academically disadvantaged is to read the books of Daniel Fader (Hooked on Books, 1968, and The Naked Children, 1971). Another very interesting source of ideas appears in The Foxfire Book (1972) where one frustrated English teacher shows how he finally dealt with the problem of students who could care less about the English curriculum.

It is my conviction that whatever the textbook a secondary reading course may be structured around, the most important strategy to be considered is what Herber calls the lesson framework. The lesson which involves reading in English class must be so structured as to allow students the maximum opportunity to use all the reading power at their command.

A lesson which does this would have three parts. First, it should be introduced by procedures which allow the student to consider all he knows of the topic considered in the selection before he actually does any reading. The structured overview, a technique we developed at Syracuse University, is designed to do exactly this. It is detailed in a monograph entitled Research in Reading in the Content Area (Herber & Sanders, 1969). This booklet is also excellent as a basic text on secondary reading and I commend it to you.

Second, the lesson should provide a variety of guide material to aid students in their comprehension of concepts included in the reading. These "crutches" will often allow the student to progress through material which might otherwise be beyond his grasp. By doing this, he may eventually be able to walk alone. Herber's book provides many ideas of how to construct and use guide material.

Third, it seems to me that students in English class should devote considerable time to evaluation of what they have read. This important last step of the lesson allows a deeper appreciation of ideas and concepts than would be possible if the student were to merely read, close his book, and walk away. It is likely that time spent in reflection is more valuable than rereading, especially if students are allowed to interact concerning their reactions, to compare their responses to guide material, to field with one another the ideas which occur to them in their reading.

There is, obviously, little time or space here to cover the content of reading electives for teachers in preparation to teach English. Perhaps, however, the foregoing comments may give some idea of what it is English teachers will need if they are to effectively handle a major part of their responsibility, the teaching of reading.

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